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— Clifford Duncan



Hal is shown above at his legendary desk in his Post-Record office in April 1966, with papers displayed visibly. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Hal Zimmerman 'The Servant Prince' dies

Camas resident was former Post-Record publisher and state legislator

By Mike Gallagher
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Harold (Hal) Zimmerman, former owner/publisher of the Camas-Washougal Post-Record, state legislator and community organizer, died Thursday from liver and kidney failure after a 10-year battle with Parkinson's disease. He was 88.

Zimmerman, who in his 53 years as a Camas resident displayed almost unlimited energy in his multiple roles of newspaper publisher, legislator and community activist was named Camas' "Citizen of the Century" by the Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce in 2006. This prestigious award was just one of several bestowed on Zimmerman

throughout his illustrious career.

A native of Valley City, N.D., Zimmerman graduated from high school in 1941, where he was valedictorian. The year before his father died in a traffic accident, so after graduation he and his mother moved to Washington and he enrolled at the University of Washington.

His college career, however, was quickly interrupted by World War II after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Zimmerman was inducted into the U.S. Army Air Corps, serving on ground duty in Texas and California. After the war, he returned to college and in 1946 met Julianne (Judy) Williams in a news writing class. They were married after graduation in 1947, and the following year the couple's first child, Karen, was born.

Early in his career Hal had worked at various newspapers, editing the North Seattle News, and editing and writing for the Sedro Woolley Cou-

rier Times. He was also an editor and sold ads for the Skagit County Dairymen magazine. But Hal and Judy by this time wanted to buy their own newspaper and learned that the Cowlitz County Advocate, in Castle Rock, was for sale. In 1950, they purchased the weekly paper and operated it until 1957. In that year, after selling the Advocate, the couple moved to Camas with children Karen, Judi Jean and Steve and acquired the Camas-Washougal Post-Record.

Journalism remained an attractive occupation for Zimmerman in the late 1950's and 1960's, but his energetic nature drew him to politics by this time as well. While residing in Castle Rock, he had been a Cowlitz County Republican chairman and on arriving in Camas he soon became a precinct committee man. Then in 1966 he decided he wanted to repre-

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sent the 17th District in the state legislature. He ran against and defeated Camas Mayor Bill Sampson for the seat, which began a 22-year career as a state representative and senator.

Zimmerman's friend and campaign manager the late George Henriksen explained, in part, how Zimmerman was victorious in his campaign for the state legislature. "He rang every doorbell in Cascade Park and points east, Henriksen said, later recalling Zimmerman's victories. "I think he established contacts and confidence that carried him through the rest of his career." In 1980, Zimmerman shifted from the state house and won a state senate seat which he held for eight years. He eventually retired from politics in 1988 having served the 17th District for 22 years, never defeated in a race for office.

1980 was another landmark year for Zimmerman and the Post-Record. In that year he decided he wanted a change of activity from the standpoint of newspaper ownership. "There were other things I wanted to do," he explained. He contacted Eagle Newspapers, based in Salem, Ore., and reached terms of a sale. But he stayed true to his love of writing and continued for many years as the paper's columnist, while at the same time serving as a state senator. "It was an easy transition," he said.

Zimmerman had barely left political office in 1988 when another job in Olympia opened up for him. Gov. Booth Gardner had appointed him to serve on the state's Pollution Control Hearings Board. The job was a good fit for Zimmerman, who always had an interest in a clean environment. In 1967 as a legislator he sent a letter to his constituents explaining that "perhaps the most important task of all is passing legislation to cope with the problems of civilization's wastes — garbage and pollution." The pollution control hearings board position started in 1988 and ended in 1993.

When Zimmerman finally left Olympia in 1993 as a retired legislator and pollution control hearings board member, he found several projects in Camas to keep him busy. He agreed to assist the Camas Downtown Vision Coalition, just as he had assisted previous Camas downtown groups in planning and implementing projects to better the downtown core.

And, with the Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce, where he was a member for 24 years, Zimmerman resumed service to both cities of Camas and Washougal. He was also president of the Kiwanis Club for one year and one of the founding members of the very successful Camas-Educational Foundation, a group formed to raise funds for schools.

Camas United Methodist Church had been a big part of his life. He and Judy were leaders in the church since 1957, when they first moved to Camas. Both sang in the choir regularly and were ac-

tive in youth groups and field trips. Hal also conceived the idea for a book about the history of the church — Mill Town Methodists — which was written by a friend, Ted Van Arsdol and is available at many local libraries.

Even with a number of community activities on their plate, the Zimmermans still found time to explore one of their most well known passions — travel. The couple eventually visited every continent, and Hal would frequently contribute guest articles and photos for the Post-Record about some of their more intriguing stops. The Zimmermans also frequently hosted friends from abroad and were big supporters of friendship and exchange groups between the U.S. and foreign countries.

In more recent years, Hal and Judy had cut back on many of their community activities but still were active, most notably in their church. In addition, Hal attended Friday Chamber "coffee hours" where he could converse with friends about events in the community. In 2006 the Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of the city of Camas, named Hal "Citizen of the Century."

"I don't think there is a better phrase to describe Dad than the servant prince," said his son Steve Zimmerman. "He could meet with heads of state, but he also listened to the people he served. He had a real interest in working for ordinary people, helping them with their problems."

Zimmerman particularly remembered his dad's work

in the state legislature. "He worked harder than any other legislator," Zimmerman continued. "He was always on the phone, always organizing, trying to solve problems. He truly was my hero."

Friend Stan Nystrom agreed with the assessment of Zimmerman's work ethic. "I don't think there was ever a harder working legislator than Hal," Nystrom said.

Another friend, local businessman and consultant Clifford "Bert" Duncan Jr., whose father was superintendent of Camas schools from 1949 to 1960, felt Zimmerman had a rare vision of how all the different entities of a community such as Camas are intertwined.

"I think he had an incredible perspective of how important a balance is between the business, educational and political communities," Duncan said. "I don't think I've met anyone that had the vigor for those three areas at the same time like Hal did. He understood that a quality community like Camas had to have a combination of the three working together. He knew that if they were at odds, it could be a disaster."

"I think what Hal left us were some real good trails and pathways to follow," Duncan concluded. "We lost the man, but he left a legacy."

Steve Zimmerman reflected on his father's passing with an uplifting thought.

"Dad is now with Mom, the woman he loved, admired and put on a pedestal," he said. "And he is now released from his suffering."